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RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000442

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TAGS: PGOV PTER PINS KDEM IZ

SUBJECT: FALLUJAH CITY COUNCIL CHAIRMAN ASSASSINATED

Classified By: Robert S. Ford, Political Counselor,  
reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

**¶1. (C) SUMMARY:** Assailants assassinated Sheikh Kamal Shakir Al-Nazal. Fallujah City Council (FCC) Chairman and senior city imam, on February 7, 2006 in central Fallujah. He had generally pursued a cooperative relationship with coalition forces. Sheikh Kamal, along with other Fallujah imams and city leaders, encouraged political participation in the October referendum and December election, and urged residents to join the police and Iraqi army. Their calls were heeded. Sheikh Kamal, along with the city's mayor, had unsuccessfully run as a candidate in the December 15 election. Sheikh Kamal's death marks the latest in a series of attacks against senior Fallujah leaders. The city's revered mufti, Sheikh Hamza Abass Al-Issawi, was murdered in late November 2005; in September 2005, attackers unsuccessfully targeted Mayor Dhari Abdul Hady Irsan Al-Zobaie. Formal FCC meetings have been suspended. One contact told PolOff that another city imam had already fled the city, with other clerics largely intimidated. Sheikh Kamal's death represents an immediate blow to governance building efforts in the city, but could also serve to galvanize residents over the long term against extremists. Fallujans continue to look to the Coalition for sustained security support and civil engagement, while warily watching developments in Baghdad as the new Shia-dominant government forms and key cabinet ministers are designated. END SUMMARY.

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ASSASSINATION BLOW  
TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE  
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**¶2. (C)** Sheikh Kamal's assassination represents an immediate loss to overarching local governance objectives in Fallujah. The Fallujah City Council, which he led, had consistently met since spring 2005 and was comprised of key city groups. The council had generally adopted a constructive approach, even though in recent weeks they had suspended work and pressed Marines regarding alleged abuses (largely unfounded or exaggerated). In a private meeting held February 7, just after Sheikh Kamal's murder, Mayor Dhari told PolOff that the FCC would not meet until "the situation calmed down." He complained that security plans proposed by him had not been adopted (moving police to stationary checkpoints in various parts of the city, and the possible introduction of Iraqi Army units from Fallujah). (NOTE: Fallujah's police chief, BG Gen Salah Al-Ani, considers his force to be too small and ill-equipped; city police number 1,200, with another 500 in training. He has requested additional support from the MOI. Two police officers told PolOff February 8 that they had not received pay for the last two months. END NOTE)

¶3. (C) Mayor Dhari described the current situation in Fallujah as tense, noting "we can't tell who our enemy is any more." He urged that Fallujah Iraqi Army recruits be trained more quickly and possibly be stationed for duty in Fallujah proper. Longstanding frustration with the lack of Ministry of Interior support for the city's police force also drew sharp criticism. Mayor Dhari stressed that reconstruction projects mattered little when security remained the overriding -- and debilitating -- concern, remarking "we do not need a third bridge (across the Euphrates); we need security, and with it, we can build many bridges. Take that money and pay more police instead."

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LASTING IMPACT?  
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¶4. (C) The murder of Sheikh Kamal, and reports of more aggressive intimidation of other Fallujah leaders (tribal and civic), will likely stall local governance and related civil engagement efforts. Whether Mayor Dhari decides to stay on the job -- he survived an assassination attempt in September 2005, shooting one of his attackers, and then showed up for the city council session two hours later -- will send an important and immediate signal to residents and other leaders. PolOff and Marine leaders have urged him to continue to function in his role, even if future meetings need to be held privately. The resumption of more normal city governance will largely depend on renewed leadership, additional steps to protect city council members, and pro-active coalition engagement efforts at the civil military

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operations center.

¶5. (C) Reactions in the city will be hard to gauge until the official mourning period is over. Initially, residents appear to be have signaled condemnation of extremist elements. Two Fallujah Iraqi policemen told PolOff February 8 that while residents were clearly unnerved, they viewed the assassination as an affront to their city -- the same sentiment that followed the November 2005 assassination of Sheikh Hamza. Still, the intimidation seems to have expanded. A local traffic police officer told PolOff February 9 that FCC member and senior imam, Sheikh Abdul Sittar, had fled to Syria. He added that many residents believed the mayor had already, or soon would, quit.

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COMMENT  
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¶6. (C) Sheikh Kamal's assassination will set back our local governance efforts in Fallujah, at least in the short term. The number of leaders willing to continue in or assume top leadership jobs in the face of renewed threats remains unclear; the Fallujah bench, however, is not deep. Unconfirmed reports of imams fleeing the city do not bode well. As a group, they have generally been cooperative, or at a minimum, preached messages of stability. Other intimidation efforts in spring and summer 2005 effectively silenced senior tribal leaders. Following Sheikh Kamal's assassination, all other groups, including the area tribal sheikhs council, mukhtars (neighborhood watch-type individuals and resident advocates), and junior imams in Fallujah who had regularly interacted with CF and PolOff, decided to suspend any further meetings. A prolonged city leadership and civic engagement vacuum would heighten citizen unease. A new Marine regiment assumes control of security operations in the city within two weeks. This transition comes at an especially sensitive time and will

need to be carefully orchestrated.

KHALILZAD